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[story by MARY GOTTSCHALK]

**T**he Indianapolis 500 Speedway is not an obvious destination for an 80-year-old Model A Ford's afternoon drive. But that's where Ankeny resident Joe Lamb found himself one sunny afternoon in 2005, along with more than 700 other Model A Restorers Club members from across the nation who'd gathered for the group's annual homage to "America's Sweetheart."

What makes Lamb's tour of the Indy track all the more remarkable is that he drove his Model A to Indianapolis and back, more than 400 miles each way. "It's a comfortable car," observes Lamb, "and I could average 50 to 55 mph most of the way."

Lamb's car is one of the nearly five million Model As produced only between October 1927 and August 1931. "They were well-built cars," notes Lamb, "structurally much more durable than the Model T."

That durability is part of the reason so many Model As — estimates run as high as several hundred thousand — are still on the road today. Tom Jamison, a Johnston resident and another Model A enthusiast, notes that most Model A owners are more interested in owning a car that runs well on the road than in a showpiece that has a perfect paint job and has to be hauled around in a trailer.

You need a dependable car to make the 800-mile round-trip Indianapolis drive — and certainly to motor through the state of Iowa for three days in the Great Annual Model A Ride Around Iowa (GAMARAI). "In 16 years, I don't think that more than three or four cars had to be brought home from GAMARAI on a trailer," boasts Lamb of the event that annually draws several dozen other Model A

lovers who form an early-20th-century caravan for a multiday tour.

Still, Jamison wonders how much longer Model As will be seen on the road. Model A owners have to know how to repair the cranky parts of an antique automobile — the gears, the brakes, the electrical system, and even the engine — because few auto shops work on cars that old.

“The Model A has a pretty basic mechanical system, great for someone who enjoys tinkering on a car,” says Jamison. “You don’t need much more than a screwdriver and a couple of wrenches to fix it.”

Modern cars, on the other hand, are so complicated that kids no longer grow up learning to take a car apart and put it back together, notes Jamison. Model A owners in their 20s and 30s are increasingly uncommon because there aren’t many people in that age group with mechanical skills to keep them running.

Lamb, 69, and Jamison, 64, are both pros at Model A maintenance. Jamison started out with a car originally purchased new in 1931 and driven by his great-grandfather. After Jamison took the wheel in his teens, he bought the car from his family and proceeded to put a lot of work into it, including enhancements to the engine and transmission to make the car safer to operate at highway speeds.

Lamb actually built his out of a Model A carcass he found in a North Dakota field in 1979. He spent four



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1931 Model A Toolkit display

years putting it back together, and he’s been working on it ever since. “I throw away all my receipts,” he says, laughing. “It’s too depressing to know what it’s cost me all told.” ♣

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*As a transplant from New York, Mary Gottschalk writes about Iowa as a way to learn the highways and byways of her adopted home state.*



## Join the A List

Iowa hosts regular confabs for roadworthy Model As, with three major events this summer. Altoona is the site for A’dventure Iowa 2012 on June 11-15, with Model As coming from as far as Denver and Oklahoma City. The fourth annual Amana Colonies Model A Day is scheduled for August 18. Model A owners plan to visit southwest Iowa towns — Greenfield, Villisca, Shenandoah, Griswold, Atlantic, Walnut, Elkhorn, and Lewis — during the 17th annual GAMARAI, September 14-16.

All are welcome — you need not drive a Model A to join the fun. For more information, visit [hawkamodelaclub.org](http://hawkamodelaclub.org) and [centraliowamodelaclub.com](http://centraliowamodelaclub.com).